



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



NINA
Engraved by Sydney E. Wilson
After Greuze

—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son

The Graceful Art of Mezzotint

By EVELYN MARIE STUART

ANYONE to whom English is a mother tongue, whose early reading has been the classics of English literature, repository of the traditions of a race, cannot fail to thrill a bit under the spell of some fine old print that recalls the beauty and the art of the graceful days when the novel first appeared as a recognized form of literary composition for recording the events and manners of English life.

The novel, the great and exquisite period of portraiture, and engraving therefrom, all seem to have burst into flower simultaneously upon British soil in an age of romance and culture.

The beauty of woman was evidently the inspiration of this quickening of artistic appreciation in a people where writing and painting had heretofore been more serious than romantic.

To this great era, made lovely by the genius of Gainsborough, Reynolds, Romney and Morland, belongs the first period of popular

and successful engraving in mezzotint, although this form of reproductive art itself antedates this century by some years. So suitable for such reproduction were the works of the eighteenth century English masters and so adequate to interpret them in another medium were the engravers of the day that it is little wonder that the English have come to be regarded as pre-eminent in the art of mezzotint, despite the fact that it originated elsewhere.

And what a wonderful art it is, scarcely secondary to that of the painter and, indeed, presenting obstacles which require much more of accurate observation and painstaking consideration in the surmounting. For whereas the painter works in a natural manner building up his shadow and light upon a neutral ground, the mezzotint engravers work from out the dark, as it were. Starting with a copper plate roughened by having been gone over eighty-four times with a sharp-toothed indenting instrument known as the rocker, he must



THE PARTY ANGLING
Engraved by Keating
After George Morland

Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son

light and shade, but also the feeling of the master, and all this by the laborious but simple process of scraping. The method alone renders it a truly remarkable form of art, for to attain success the craftsman must possess a sure touch of faultless perfection, since errors may not be corrected without detriment to the plate.

Strangely enough, color has come to be generally associated with mezzotints, though the first and some of the greatest examples of the art are in black and white, and color was not introduced until the art

build up his picture by scraping in the lighter masses and leaving the dark ones. Instead of working in his shadows he must work in his larger expanses of lighter tone as well as his high lights. The extreme difficulty of such a process and the exquisitely delicate effects achieved in mezzotint make one marvel at human patience and skill.

The initial indenting of the plate by the rocker produces a texture different from any other engraving, a wonderful soft, velvety effect appearing in the deepest tones, that is one of the delights of a mezzotint. Working from the original painting in a reverse way, the engraver must nevertheless preserve not only the likeness and quality of

had reached the height of its glory during the first English period made bright by Ward, MacArdell, Valentine Green and J. R. Smith.

During the second or Mid-Victorian period,



THE VISIT TO THE BOARDING SCHOOL
Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son

Engraved by William Ward
After George Morland



COUNTESS OF DURHAM
Engraved by Sydney E. Wilson
After Lawrence

—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son

wherein Samuel Cousins is the foremost name, taste reverted to the original black and white. With the reawakening of enthusiasm for mezzotint in modern times, color has come back into form, although the work of our greatest contemporary, Sydney Wilson, is so pre-eminent in fidelity to the original masters and so little dependent upon color for its supreme effect.

The coloring of any mezzotint is quite independent of the engraving, and is often done exclusively by the printer. It requires all of three months to color the average edition from one plate, as the plate must be inked anew for each impression, and the coloring is almost an art or craft in itself. Some of the master engravers have, indeed, colored and printed from their own plates, but this is not at all necessary. Reynolds is said to have himself colored some plates from his own paintings so that the process is not to be held beneath the skill or dignity of an artist, however. One must not forget that a mezzotint is not of necessity colored at all and that fine examples

in black and white are always regarded as choice possessions by connoisseurs.

Indeed, it is in its recognition of the pleasing possibilities of graceful and well-balanced arrangements of light and shade that the mezzotint stands supreme. It accentuates composition and *chiaroscuro* in a rhythmic and harmonious manner. "Some of the best of the mezzotints done during the eighteenth century by English engravers," writes Cyril Davenport, "reveal beauties of light and shadow which were only latent in the original pictures and which the process of mezzotinting, with its pure tones, is alone capable of exhibiting in true perfection."

These innate and charming peculiarities of the art explain why certain artists, notably Sir Joshua Reynolds and his school, afford the most popular subjects for the mezzotinter. So strong is the sense of design with all the great men of the great English portrait period that they have always worked to produce pictures



LADY ELIZABETH LEE
Engraved by Clifford James
After Sir Joshua Reynolds

—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son



MRS. BRADDYLL
Engraved by Samuel Cousins, R. A.
After Sir Joshua Reynolds
—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son

first of all, things beautiful and harmonious by reason of their general composition and balance of light and shade. So peculiarly fitted are these works for reproduction in mezzotint that the engravings in some instances actually improve upon the originals and are pronounced by critics to be finer works of art. A mezzotint exercises the selective faculty common to all artists, accentuating what he likes and subordinating other things thereto so that there is as much individuality in his art as there is in painting.

Blent with all of these endowments of art and individuality the mezzotints from great English portraits possess further the compelling allurements of romance, for nearly everyone of the subjects had a history as famous as her beauty. Gainsborough's Duchess of Devonshire, renowned for all time for loveliness and charm, she who bought the butcher's vote with a kiss at a close election; Romney's Lady Hamilton, adventuress and supreme fascinator of great men, inspiration of Lord Nelson to feats of heroism and of Romney

to triumphs of art, the Ladies Waldegrave, nieces of Horace Walpole; what names are theirs to conjure with!

Our illustrations cover the three great periods in English engraving, from Ward to Wilson. Of the first, "The Visit to the Boarding School," engraved after George Morland, is a particularly fine example. Here we are brought face to face with one of the noblest aspects of English art, the wholesome purity of its beauty in its choice of innocent or ennobling scenes.

How different are such themes from those of the French print of about the same period, as different as the literature of the two lands. English art and English literature never lose sight of the home as their sphere of adornment or the young as their field of influence, a point of view that is not without support in the fundamental conscience of the race.

This is a precious old print in color of delightful quality, revealing artist and engraver at their best. "The Party Angling," engraved by Keating, after Morland, is likewise quaint and agreeable. It is interesting to note that Sydney Wilson is said to be about to bring out this subject and its companion, "The Angler's Repast."

To the second or Mid-Victorian period of mezzotint belong the fine black and white prints of Mrs. Braddyll, engraved by Samuel Cousins, R. A., after Reynolds, and presented herewith. Scarcely fifty impressions were taken from the original plate, which was so damaged in a fire as to necessitate complete destruction. One cannot but note the extreme grace and beauty which render this portrait so alluring, in black and white.

Of the modern period we have three illustrations, two the works of Sydney E. Wilson. These are selected with a view to emphasizing the diversity and variety of handling which characterizes the work of this versatile man. Possessed of a strong individuality he is, nevertheless, great, not only in his particular style, but in his preservation of the characteristic styles of the painter after whom he has engraved. He preserves the true quality of the originals so accurately that an artist who knew painters well, though nothing of mezzo-

tint, in looking over a collection of Wilson's prints, remarked on the technical individuality of the artists represented. This is, indeed, the supreme test of his genius. Thus when we contrast his Countess of Durham, after Lawrence, with his Mrs. Bell, after Raeburn, we see, in the one, exquisite detail; in the other, breadth of handling; while his Gainsboroughs have a lovely grey transparent feeling and a charming distance characteristic of the painter, things which no other engraver has been so successful in attaining. His Nina, after Greuze, herewith illustrated, is as faithful to the charm of delicate youthful flesh as was the great French master's own brush work.

Lady Elizabeth Lee, after Reynolds, by Clifford James, illustrates the charm of individuality in the style of an engraver, for it is marked by a most agreeable softness and a breadth of style, characteristic of this man who sees first the picturesque quality of his subject.

In passing, we might remark that the interest in modern mezzotints is increasing, but it should be even greater than it is, for in no other branch of art can better investments be made. When one compares the figures at

which some famous prints were issued with their market value today the impression is most amazing and encourages one in the purchase of fine examples just from the plate.

For example, James Walker's mezzotint of Mrs. Musters, after Romney, issued at three shillings (about seventy-five cents), in 1780, sold, in 1914, at seven hundred and sixty guineas, or about four thousand dollars. The Ladies Waldegrave, engraved by Valentine Green, after Reynolds, has sold as high as five hundred and sixty guineas, which is nearly double what Walpole paid for the original painting.

However, new collectors, in their fresh enthusiasm over mezzotints, often go to the opposite extreme of imagining that any mezzotint is bound to live and increase in value. Nothing could be farther from the truth as, unless the work of a really gifted engraver, their value may be questionable at any stage. In all the company of cotemporary workers there are but a few great names. A knowledge of these and of values will enable the collector to secure works of real art and prints of real value, things which are a "joy forever" and an investment instead of an extravagance.